Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 16 Number 2 February 2019

**FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 24th February 2019: Pocharam WLS & Lake. Meeting point: Opp. Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.00AM.**

Pocharam is a large reservoir on the Manjeera River, about 70 km downstream from Manjeera Barrage. The reservoir is situated amidst undulating hills, with dry deciduous forest and scrub jungle. The lake varies in extent from 15,000 to 20,000 ha depending upon the season and fluctuations in rainfall. The lake is known to support a wide variety of resident, as well as migratory waterfowl. More than 53 species of waterfowl are listed for the area. Specialities include Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill and Bar-headed Goose. This will be a half-day trip. As usual, Surekha (9949038532) will coordinate. Please let her know if you need a lift. Vehicle owners are also requested to contact her in case you can accommodate extra passengers.

Members are requested to be on time as it is a long, two-hour drive. Non-members are requested to donate Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. We will also be carrying our new T-Shirts and Caps, and suggest you buy your quota before the stock is exhausted. T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-. Please tender exact change.

**INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr M Ram Mohan, Forest Range Officer, Bejjur Reserve Forest on "Vultures of Palarapu Cliff". Tuesday, 19th February 2019, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Mr Ram Mohan brought into light the breeding colony of the Long-billed Vulture, a Critically Endangered species, at Palarapu Gutta (cliff) in the Kagaznagar Forest Division of Adilabad Circle in 2013. The habitat is considered to be one of a very few habitats in Southern India and only vulture habitat in both the Telugu States, and he was instrumental in devising the Vulture Conservation Plan which has been implemented since January 2014 by the Telangana Forest Department.

## Trip Report – Manjeera Barrage, December 23, 2018

Madhuri Mondal

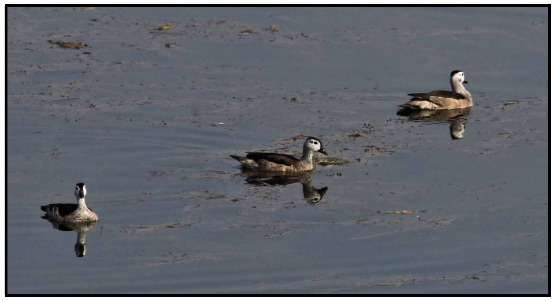
**Part of the group at Manjeera** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

The last BSAP field trip of 2018 was at the Manjeera Reservoir. It is a man-made reservoir situated inside the Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary (MWS). MWS covers an area of 20 sq.km, and is located in Medak district, 50 km away from Hyderabad. It was notified as a wildlife sanctuary in 1978 to protect the riverine ecosystem. The reservoir is a marshy wetland, surrounded by grassland. By December, small pools and islands had formed as the water level had come down.

I had been missing the opportunity to visit Manjeera for birding since the last couple of years. So, this time, when I saw the mail announcing the field trip, I made up my mind to attend it somehow and voila! it turned out to be an amazing trip.

**Red-rumped Swallow** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

As we reached the barrage, we were greeted by a mixed flock of swallows on a wire. There were Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), Streak-throated Swallows (*Petrochelidon fluvicola*) and Red-rumped Swallows (*Cecropis daurica*).



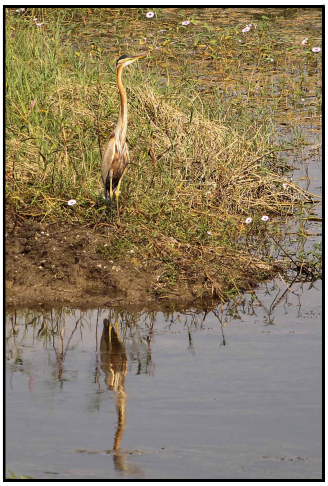
**Cotton Pygmy-goose** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

The first glance at the reservoir rewarded us with the sightings of a large group of Cotton Pygmy-goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) and a basking Marsh Crocodile or *mugger*.

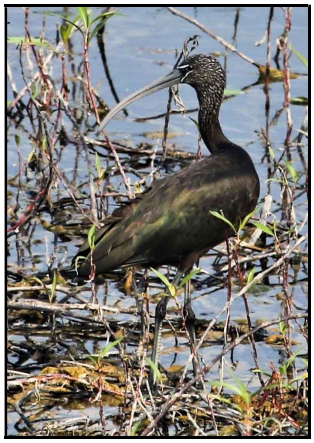
**Marsh Crocodile (aka *Mugger*)** (Photo: Raghu SR)

As I scanned through my binoculars, other waterfowl also revealed themselves. Amongst them were the purple beauties – Grey-headed Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) and the Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*).

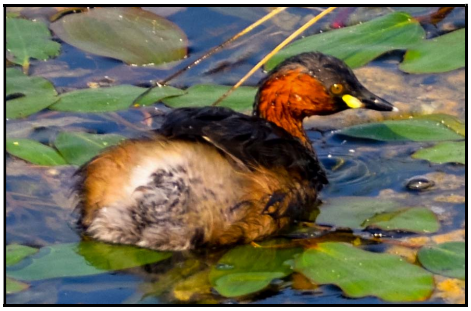
**Grey-headed Swamphen** (Photo: Raghu SR)



**Purple Heron**
(Photo: Madhuri Mondal)



**Glossy Ibis** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



**Little Grebe** (Photo: Raghu SR)

**Bronze-winged Jacana Adult (L) and Immature (R)**
(Photos: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Next on the radar were the Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*) and the Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*). While I was appreciating their beauty and observing their foraging behaviour, a Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) landed in the marshes. I watched a Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) dive into the water and disappear, only to reappear elsewhere. A Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) was perched on a wooden pole, looking for prey.

**Common Kingfisher**
(Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

**Western Reef Egret**
(Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

While all this drama was unfolding, the surprise of the day appeared. We noticed a grey-coloured Egret foraging in the marshes. A good observation, along with a look at the field guides, led us to conclude that it was the Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*), a rare sight for this location.

**Black-headed Ibis** (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

Then appeared the Black-headed Ibises (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), graceful in their black and white attire. At a distance towards the marshy grasslands, I saw Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) and Asian Openbills (*Anastomus oscitans*) gliding smoothly over the grasslands. A few Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) were sitting on the bushes looking for prey.

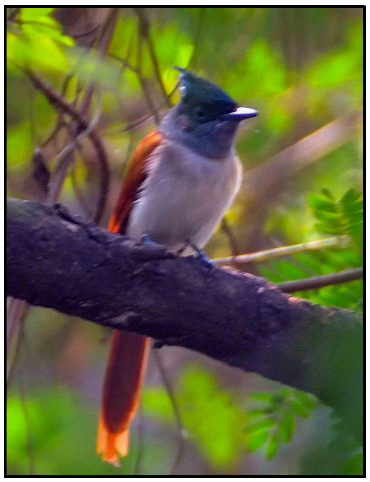
**River Tern** (Photo: Raghu SR)

**Whiskered Tern** (Photo: Raghu SR)

Other interesting birds on the barrage were the Terns. Along with the commonly-seen River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*), there was another small Tern species flying swiftly over the reservoir; it was later identified from photographs as a Whiskered Tern.

**Osprey** (Photo: Raghu SR)

One of the most interesting sightings of the day was the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*). Though I wasn't lucky enough to see it directly, one of our friends had sighted it and took some photos of it.



**Asian Paradise-flycatcher**
(Photo: Raghu SR)

**Grey Wagtail** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

We then decided to watch some forest birds and walked around the reservoir, which turned out to be a rewarding experience as well. One of my friends pointed out an Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). In the process of getting a better look, we also saw a White-Breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and a Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) around a stream nearby.

**Blue-tailed Bee-eater**
(Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

**Green Bee-eater** (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

We got to see the elegant Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*) sitting on a wire. The bird gave us enough time to appreciate its beauty. A Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) and a few Wire-tailed Swallows (*Hirundo smithii*) with their beautiful hanging wire-like tails were sitting on another wire.

**Wire-tailed Swallow** (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

One of the lifers for me that day was the Chestnut-tailed Starling (*Sturnia malabarica*). Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Chestnut-tailed Starlings are winter migrants to this part of the country. The other starlings we saw that day were Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnia pagodarum*) and Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*). A little ahead, we spotted a Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*) and the elusive White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*). We also spotted the Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) and Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) on that trail.

**Long-tailed Shrike** (Photo: Madhuri Mondal)

**View of Tallapalli village waterbody with avifauna** (Photo: Raghu SR)

As we watched the baby crocodiles at the Nature Education Centre of MWS, I got a call from Shafaat uncle informing me about Flamingos in a nearby lake. With a sudden rush of excitement, we started towards the lake, which is beside Tallapalli village.

The walk towards this lake added few more species to the list. There were Eurasian Coots (*Fulica atra*), Egrets and other common waterfowl in a small lake on the way. In the bushes, we spotted Ashy (*Prinia socialis*) and Plain Prinias (*Prinia inornata*). Flocks of Red Avadavats (*Amandava amandava*) flew out from the shrubs while we walked past. We saw some Collared Pratincoles (*Glareola pratincola*) gliding high in the sky and a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*).

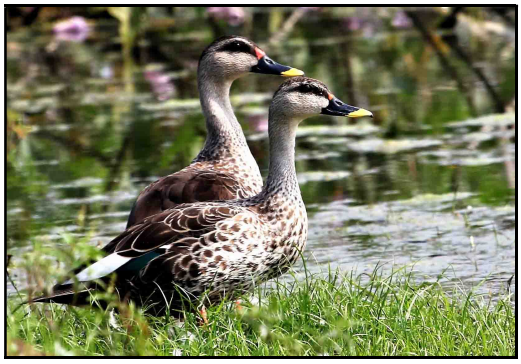
**Collared Pratincole** (Photo: Raghu SR)

On reaching the lake, we saw a flock of Flamingos through the binoculars. We counted 37 one-legged pink beauties. Some of them were resting or taking a nap, while some of them made loops with their long necks. There was also one lone Eurasian Spoonbill amidst the Greater Flamingos.

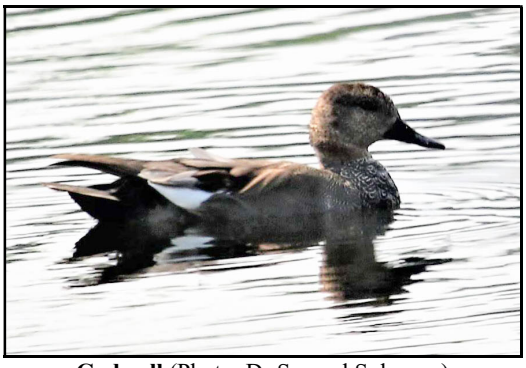
**Greater Flamingo (Adult and Immature) with Eurasian Spoonbill** (Photo: Raghu SR)

The lake was teeming with life and colour. It was a haven for many resident and migratory ducks. The resident ducks present there were the Lesser Whistling-ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Cotton Pygmy-goose and the Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*). Migrants were the Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Garganey (*Anas querquedula*), Northern Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*), Common Teals (*Anas crecca*), Eurasian Wigeons (*Anas penelope*) and one Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) which was identified later from photographs.

**Lesser Whistling-duck** (Photo: Raghu SR)



**Spot-billed Duck** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)



**Gadwall** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

While walking through the fields, we had some other interesting sightings. One mongoose appeared from somewhere and quickly ran into the bushes.

**Baya Weaver** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

We saw some Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*), Asian Pied Starlings (*Gracupica contra*), a Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*), a Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*), a Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*) and some other common species.

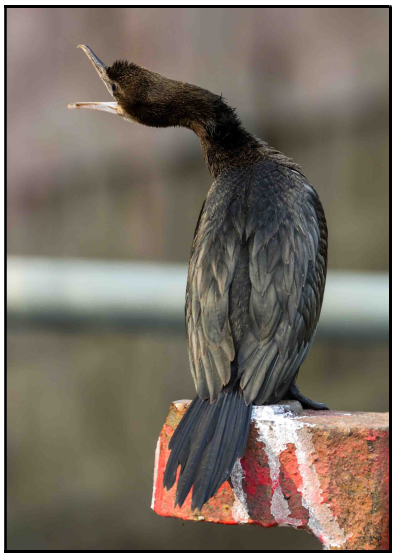
**Pied Bushchat** (Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

**Paddyfield Pipit** (Photo: Raghu SR)

The lake was home to around 200 Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), many Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) and River Terns. By now it was almost 2:00PM… hungry and tired, but completely content, we called it a day.

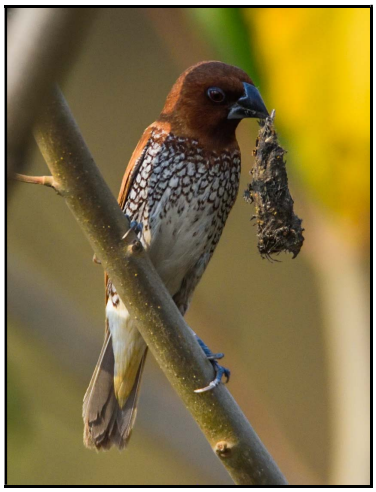
**Black-winged Stilt**
(Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

Some other photos taken during the trip:



**Little Cormorant** (Photo: Raghu SR)

**Stray dogs chasing and disturbing the birds**
(Photo: Raghu SR)



**Scaly-breasted Munia** (Photo: Raghu SR)

**Black-shouldered Kite**
(Photo: Dr Samuel Sukumar)

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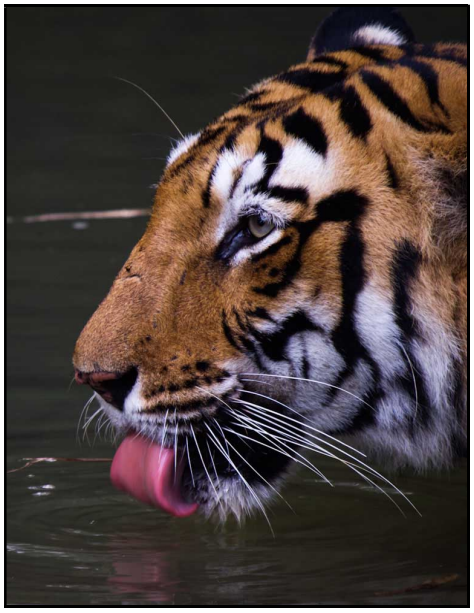
# Trip Report – Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, December 10-14, 2018

Text and Photos: Janardhan Reddy



**Chhoti Tara**

Eight of us in 2 vehicles left Hyderabad for Tadoba early on December 10, 2018. We decided to take the longer route – NH44 to Karanji and then MHS6/7 to Chandrapur via Wani. This route is 60km longer than the one via Mancherial, but we had heard that the Mancherial-Chandrapur road was in bad condition. Our decision was wise as we got to Tadoba well in time for a quick lunch, after which we went into the forest at 2:30PM.

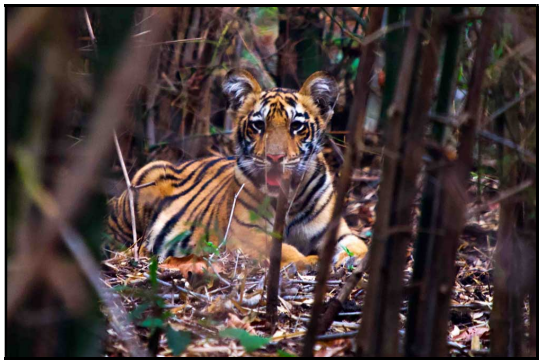
A new rule bans the carrying of mobile phones and tablets into the forest. This is to prevent phones from being used to inform others about tiger sightings.

**Chhoti Tara**

We started the afternoon well with a tiger sighting of Chhoti Tara and one of her cubs. They were on a kill and the mother walked straight towards us and then entered a small water hole to quench her thirst after a heavy meal.

**In the waterhole**

One cub was visible but stayed inside the forest.



**Chhoti Tara's cub**

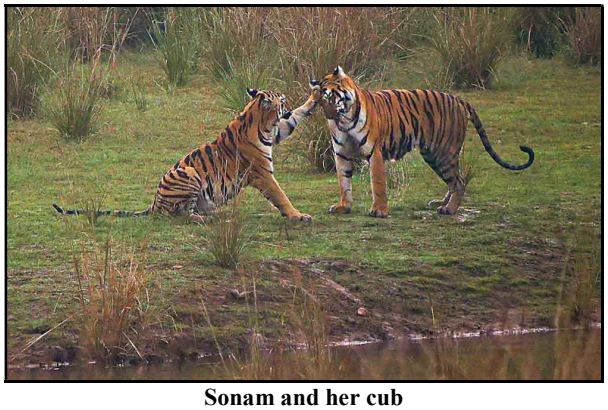
Soon after, we glimpsed a Leopard that ran across the road. Over the next couple of days, we sighted 2 more leopards, including a melanistic one (Black Leopard). It had been recently sighted and is quite a rarity in Central India. It is more common in the Western Ghats, Nilgiri Biosphere and the North-east.

The next couple of days continued with great sightings of tigers and their cubs:

- Maya and her two 12-to-14-month-old cubs in a playful mood

**The playful cubs**

- Sonam and her cub

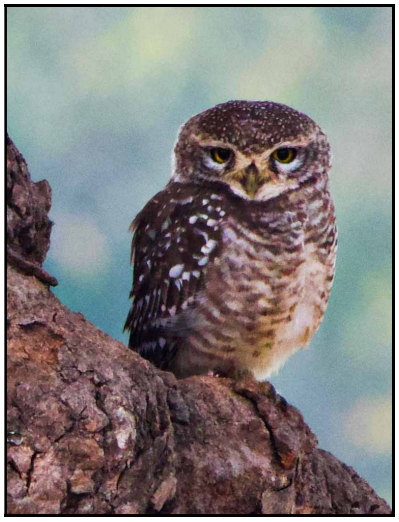


**Sonam and her cub**

Some visitors had also witnessed Sonam earlier hunting and killing a Sambar fawn.

**Chhoti Tara's 3-year-old blocking the road**

The 4th adult tiger that we saw was a 3-year-old progeny of Chhoti Tara. A beautiful specimen! He occupied the road and had a long nap, resulting in all of us having to find another route out of the forest. Sadly, his brother had been electrocuted in the buffer zone a couple of days earlier.



**Spotted Owlet**

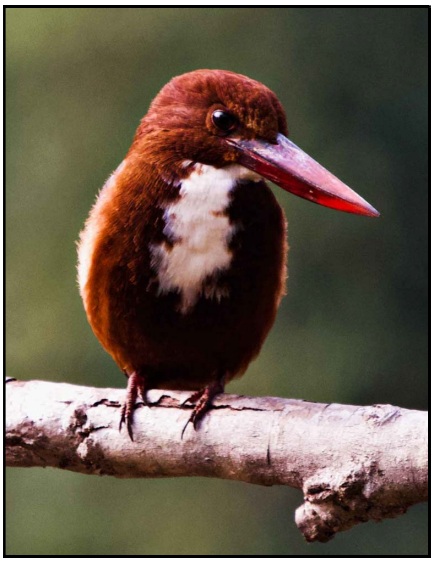
**Grey Junglefowl**

**White-eyed Buzzard**

**Alexandrine Parakeet**

The bird life was equally exciting, with sightings of Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*), Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*), White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*) (possibly juvenile), Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*).

**Green Bee-eater**



**White-throated Kingfisher**

**Red-naped Ibis**

**Great Egret**

We also saw the Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), White-throated Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Red-naped Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*), Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*), Great Egrets (*Egretta alba*), unidentified Ducks and Teals, and finally a Crested Hawk Eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*) with its prey of a Hare.

**Crested Hawk Eagle with kill**

We could hear plenty of other birds – perhaps many more than on earlier visits.

Other animals sighted were Gaur, Sambar, Chital, Barking Deer (Muntjac), Wild Boar, Nilgai and Mongoose.

The forest was in excellent condition and all the animals looked healthy and well-fed.

Sadly, on the 14th, we had to leave this beautiful forest and return to the humdrum of the city. All in all a great trip.

**Bay-backed Shrike**

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## Trip Report – Sultanpur National Park, Gurugram, December 2018

Text and Photos: Sita Susarla

**Common Cranes at Sultanpur National Park**

With an area of 1.43 sq km, the Sultanpur National Park in the Gurugram district of Haryana is well carved out for migratory birds. Special bunds and islands, four tube wells that pump Yamuna water to the park, trees that are popular with birds like *Acacia Nilotica*, *Acacia Tortilis*, *Beris* and *Neem* have all contributed significantly to making the park a sanctuary for birds. A visit to this park and nearby mudflats, and the Najafgarh *Jheel*, during the winter months is a fascinating experience for any birder.

We set off with a guide to see the Variable Wheatear that had just arrived in the mudflats of Sultanpur. It seems the Variable Wheatear was seen again after a gap of 2 years and our guide happened to have spotted it a couple of days before. Apart from the Variable Wheatear, there were also the Common Starling, Northern Lapwing, Long-legged Buzzard and Stolickza's Bushchat on our target list.

**Isabelline Wheatear**

While looking for the Wheatear we came across the beautiful Isabelline Wheatear, the Desert Wheatear and a flock of Greater Short-toed Larks – all migrants.

**Desert Wheatear female**

**Greater Short-toed Lark**

As the sunrays streamed through the cold winter morning on the late November day, a Marsh Harrier flew by close to the ground as if to warm up for the day.

**Southern Grey Shrike**

A pair of Southern Grey Shrikes kept calling to each other as we walked the length of the flats scouting for the new arrival. After a few clicks of the Shrike, that perched very close to us, the guide turned our attention to the Long-legged Buzzard sunning atop an electric pole.

We scrambled for the Binoculars and Cameras to take some quick pictures, but soon realized that the Buzzard was in no hurry to leave its warm perch. A little further up a Tawny Pipit, an Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark and a Long-tailed Shrike were seen in conversation on a bund.

**Long-legged Buzzard**

**Tawny Pipit**

As there was no sign of the Wheatear, we decided to visit the nearby Najafgarh *Jheel* and come back to the flats after lunch. We drove for about ten minutes to reach the *Jheel* where a flock of Common Cranes happened to be regular visitors. Here we saw a flock of Common (aka Eurasian) Starlings perched on adjacent shrubs. The Starlings in dark dotted colours were glistening in the bright light. The calls were a series of different notes, distinctly different from those of other Starlings.

**Common Starling**

The *Jheel* side was a serene wetland with not a soul around and a perfect birding place. We saw a flock of Common Cranes feeding on grain. As we approached them, they fluttered into the sky only a few feet above us, circled and turned away to a distant field. This gave us an opportunity to take some pictures of the Cranes in flight. There were around ten Pied Avocets, some Black-winged Stilts, and a few Painted Storks, Wood and Common Sandpipers wading through the marshes.

**Common Stonechat**

After a quick bite at the eateries we set off once again to the mudflats in search of the Variable Wheatear. This time our guide spotted it exactly at the same location it was a couple of days ago. It is a common practice in Delhi to approach the bird in a car, and shoot pictures also from there. This way we get to observe the bird without disturbing it.

The polymorphic Variable Wheatear is a winter migrant to Sultanpur. It comes in three morphs, the black-bellied, the white-bellied and the white-crowned. What we saw in Sultanpur was black-bellied morph.

**Variable Wheatear**

Our guide was already looking for Stoliczka's Bushchat by the time we were finished with the Wheatear. With no sign of it we returned to the National Park to see some ducks. It was around 3:30PM and two Greater Spotted Eagles were actively hunting for prey, swooping over the waters. The park was brimming with Painted Storks and their chicks, and huge flocks of Great Cormorants, Greylag Geese, Shovellers, Pintails, Grebes and Coots. After scanning for an hour for any new arrivals we decided to call it a day. We thanked the guide, a keen observer of birds for the last twenty years around Sultanpur, for showing us around. With five lifers it was indeed a great field day for us.

**Isabelline Shrike**

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**For Private Circulation Only**
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